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THE

Achievements and Hopes

— OF —

OUR SPECIALTY.

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# THE ACHIEVEMENTS AND HOPES OF OUR SPECIALTY.

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Ages before the "healing art" was based upon scientific principles, the practice of medicine was quite general in every inhabited portion of the globe. The "medicine man" may date his existence as far back as history can exhibit a record, and even among the most barbarous nations of the earth, the "healer of diseases" has ever occupied a prominent and influential position among his fellow countrymen.

The uneducated masses, from the earliest period to the present, have looked upon the physician as though possessing a sort of super-human power, and the best elements of civilized society have sought his counsel and confided to his care their lives and the most precious jewels of their hearts. Although empiricism for countless generations held its sway, the art of medicine through each successive period has witnessed some degree of material progress. Accumulated knowledge acquired by experimental practice, and experiences of careful observers became foundation elements for a broad professional structure.

But in order to possess the ability to diagnose disease, and to practice medicine intelligently, a clear conception of fundamental laws is always necessary for proper guidance; so a comprehensive study of the human structure and of functional action were elementary steps in the direction of scientific advance. A familiar knowledge concerning the nature of diseases, their origin, symptoms, peculiarities and tendencies; also, the ready suggestion of proper means for their alleviation, arrestation and eradication, are necessary requirements if successful issues can be expected or hoped for. Hence, the study of anatomy, physiology, histology, pathology, chemistry and materia-medica were deemed

essential to professional growth, and for qualifying students to enter the field of medical practice.

So through consecutive ages, illuminated by revelations of science and aided by practical teachings of earnest and thinking minds, the profession of medicine attained an exalted sphere of usefulness and eminent standing.

In due course of time, with a view to extend the usefulness of medical practice, and in order to meet the increasing demands of growing communities for medical attention, also with a desire to confer the greatest possible benefits to suffering humanity, special departments were created where concentrated effort might be directed to particular ailments, the character of each better understood and more favorable results obtained in their treatment. Diseases of the eye and ear; pulmonary, catarrhal, spinal, neural, mental, cutaneous and other affections or disorders were considered as diseases requiring special study: and not the least in importance among these specialties may be classed the treatment of the teeth, and all diseases or abnormal defects existing within the buccal cavity. In no department of medicine has greater or more marked progress been made within the last quarter century than in the department of dentistry or oral surgery.

Not many years ago, dentists were considered outside the pale of professional recognition. They were a class of isolated beings, pursuing their vocation in a very quiet way, and gathering instruction mainly by lessons of individual experience. Knowing little of each other, they hardly dreamed the immense benefits that might accrue from mutual intercourse and associated effort, both to themselves and to their clientelle. Many of the pioneers were men of education and genius. Some had been unfortunate in other pursuits, and in search for a new field of employment turned their attention to dental art, viewing it as a lucrative and easy sort of employment. But the real earnest and intelligent workers in the course of their active duties, could in reality foresee in the practice of dentistry, a broad field for useful labor, and one, which if rightly improved and cultivated, might produce a harvest that would prove not only a boon to themselves and their successors, but a blessing to humanity.

In early times, as no opportunities existed for obtaining the knowledge to practice dentistry intelligently, and failing in their efforts to secure satisfactory arrangements with medical schools, then in existence, our energetic pioneers, with courage undaunted, laid the foundation-stone of an independent institution in Baltimore, the city of monumental fame, where it still stands as a memento of their zeal and perseverance. There, dentistry was cradled and nourished, until it became an art based on a scientific foundation. There, it received an impetus that no human power could check. There, precious seeds were sown for professional growth, which in due time germinated and bore fruits worthy the toil. Encouraged by this success, another school was founded—the Ohio College. Philadelphia next added a



school to the list, and the number of such institutions has so increased that at the present time dental colleges exist in nearly every section of the country.

Great and good work have they done in preparing so many members of our specialty for the duties of their calling. Students from nearly every civilized part of the world have sought access to their halls, and received such instruction as their teachers could impart. Much credit is due to the founders of these institutions, and their successors, who have given their time, energy, and talent to redeem the art of dentistry from the thralldom of empiricism, and engraft it as a healthful branch of the great medical brotherhood.

The establishment of dental colleges paved the way for the formation of dental societies, and these have probably done more to promote the growth of dentistry, and extend its benefits, than all other influences combined. Located as they are, in every section of our land, they unite in fraternal relationship, the leading members in each locality, while State, National and International organizations bring together the representative individuals of the various sections, thus affording rare opportunities for a free interchange of thought and opinion, and of giving and receiving the choicest fruits of individual experience. Societies are the life and strength of a profession. They infuse a spirit of healthful rivalry, engender mutual good-will, encourage every effort for advancement; and, as each progressive step is taken, move onward for greater achievements. They cultivate largely the social element, root out morbid strife and selfish animosities, and brand as unprofessional all that is base and dishonorable. The societies first established dental clinics, which in value to our specialty, can hardly be estimated as methods of instruction. They also give aid and encouragement to the colleges, and furnish much of the material that fills the pages of the dental periodicals. They have secured Legislative enactments to protect communities from mischievous operations of incompetent operators—they have fought charlatanism with relentless vigor, and will never cease their warfare until quackery is vanquished. All honor to our dental societies for the good they have accomplished, and the achievements they have won.

Dentistry to-day holds a position as a most useful and honorable calling. Indeed, its services to mankind are not only invaluable, but indispensable in all civilized communities. Through its ministrations pain is mitigated, physical comfort sustained, health supported, life prolonged. There is hardly a village in the country not represented by some of its members, and in our large cities their numbers are legion. Millions of people seek their aid, and profit by their labors and counsel. The organs of mastication, so useful in their goodly offices, and so important in their relations to the animal economy, and which, in many instances, would hardly retain their integrity until even the first score of life's summers are witnessed, are, by the dentist's skill and care, kept in a state of preservation to ripe old age. And when

misfortune has lessened their numbers or rendered them unfit for continued service, dental art comes to the rescue to fill the vacant spaces and again complete a denture.

But our vigorous and growing specialty is never satisfied with past achievements or present gains. It is continually striving and hoping for something better; ever seeking new truths, originating new ideas, working out new problems, suggesting new means, devising new methods, testing new inventions, discussing new theories, and investigating deeper, more thoroughly, and more intelligently, everything bearing upon dentistry that has not already been fully revealed or satisfactorily demonstrated. Its members have made many contributions to general science, and through their ingenuity and skill, valuable appliances have been devised, which have added materially to the welfare and comfort of mankind. The use of electricity as a motor, was in great part due to the genius of Dr. Bonwill, of Philadelphia. The invention of celluloid, used so extensively in the arts, and the perfection of the dental engine, so valuable to dentist and surgeon, were results from the laboratory experiments of dentists. And the wonderful sewing machine, so indispensable to household needs, was originated by Dr. Avery, a New York dentist. The use of hard rubber as a surgeon's splint was first suggested by Dr. Gunning, of New York, and has proved the most suitable splint for a fractured jaw, known to surgery. And did not anæsthesia originate in the active brain of a New England dentist? In the city park of Hartford stands a fine bronze statue, on a huge granite pedestal, erected to the memory of the late Horace Wells of that city, whose name should live as long as humanity exists, for having given to the world this beneficent agent for the relief of physical suffering, and to make surgical operations painless and endurable. And it may further be stated that Dr. Wells was an inventive genius, who devised not only a number of valuable instruments and appliances to facilitate dental operations, but other appliances outside his professional requirements. It may interest the wheelmen, who glide noiselessly over the smooth pavements on their swift running bicycles, that Dr. Wells invented the first carriage propelled by the rider, ever heard of in this country, and who declared, that when perfected, could be made to travel ten miles an hour. I mention this simply to show the ever-working genius of this remarkable man, whom I knew in my boyhood as a personal friend.

In the study of histology, few men have penetrated deeper, and achieved better results than have the members of our specialty. In the field of microscopy, they have worked with an intelligent will, and the whole medical body has profited by their disclosures. Where can be found a more brilliant array of workers with the microscope than our specialty can furnish? Tomes, Miller, Black, Bodecker, Atkinson, Abbott, McQuillan, Mayo, Stowell, Sudduth, Andrews, Allan, and a host of others? And even our distinguished Heitzman has for

years been so intimately associated and thoroughly identified with the dental fraternity, that he seems to belong to our body.

The earnest efforts of the leading members of our specialty, and the energy manifested in our dental colleges to impart the needed instruction, and place oral surgery in its rightful position, has been such as to challenge attention from the prominent universities in the different sections of our country. To our honor should it be indelibly inscribed, that grand old *Harvard* first broke the icy barrier, and opened its doors to bid us welcome. And to supplement the affair, one of Boston's most distinguished sons, the world-renowned *Holmes*, on an occasion like the present, delivered the annual address before this academy. Within a few years, the great University of Pennsylvania erected among its buildings an immense stone structure, in order to increase its facilities for giving instruction in the department of dentistry. The University of Maryland soon after established a dental department, and other universities have since followed their example. I am strongly impressed with the belief that, sooner or later, the independent dental colleges will become absorbed by our large universities, which have already adopted most of the schools of medicine. The tide seems to have turned strongly in this direction. To prevent it, we cannot, if we would, for progress moves only with forward strides. And why should we desire to prevent this union with the universities? They can offer better inducements to students; they have greater influence, and hold a more exalted position in the eyes of the community; their resources are more ample, their facilities more extended, their system more complete; and giving the matter careful consideration, is it not better for students of dentistry, and students of general medicine also, to pursue their studies together? By this means the student of dentistry has opportunities for obtaining a more perfect knowledge of general medicine, and the student of medicine to become better acquainted with the duties of our specialty, thus benefitting all. Students of the different specialties graduate on the same plane and platform, receive their degrees from the same source, and secure a common recognition with all students of medicine. Is not this an advance in the right direction, and should it not constitute one of our hopes?

Some members of our brotherhood, from peculiar reasons or caprices of their own, seem determined to have us believe that dentistry is *not* a specialty of medicine, but an independent profession. They appear to find a strange sort of satisfaction in proclaiming their independence, and argue that the duties of the dentist are unlike those of the general practitioner. Could they not say the same of the oculist, the orthopedic surgeon, and indeed of all other specialists? Are not the duties of the physician to administer to the sick and suffering, and to battle with the various "ills that flesh is heir to"? And are not the duties of our specialty to administer to many of these ailments, and to relieve suffering also? Aye, and do they not by their timely

ministrations *prevent* many human ills, and thus verify the trite old axiom, that "prevention is better than cure" ? Untold misery results from the rebellious demonstrations of neglected dentures. Days of acute torture, and nights of restless agony : pulpitis with merciless pangs of piercing pain that carry the sufferer to the verge of distraction : pericementitis, with throbbing throes of dire distress, swelling lips and cheeks, and often prostrating the entire organism. Exostosis, so difficult to diagnose, and so violent in its demonstrations ; alveolar abscess, fistulous openings through jaws, gums and cheeks, emitting jets of sickening pus, and sometimes marring for life the facial contour : diseased antrum, with annoying and vicious discharges of purulent matter : necrosed bone and its attendant evils : diseases of gums and alveolar cells that cause absorption of process and exfoliation of teeth ; dental carries that destroy the integrity of the teeth, vitiate the buccal fluids and pollute the breath !

Is it "mere mechanical art" to remedy evils like these ? To be sure, the nicest mechanical skill and genius are requisite in the treatment of nearly all such cases, and mechanical art is an essential qualification in many departments of medical practice. In all operations of surgery, an ability to manipulate skilfully is a most important desideratum. The amputation of a limb, the adjustment of a splint, the removal of a cataract, the ligation of an artery, the excision of a tumor, may as appropriately be classed "mechanical operations" as are the usual operations within the oral cavity. Is the treatment of alveolar abscess any less important than are a score of other physical ills that require medical attention ?

Where the human countenance is disfigured by protruding jaws and distended lips, or by contracted dental arches with the teeth out of all line of regularity, distorting the features, and causing perhaps a life of disappointment and sorrow — is not something far beyond mere mechanism required to correct and restore such deformities ? Is not the treatment of spinal curvatures as much mechanical art as is the restoration of irregular dentures ? Are operations of the upper section of the human structure less important from a medical standpoint than are those of the other sections ? and is not a like degree of skill, care, and good judgment requisite in their treatment ?

When we consider how essential to health are the organs of mastication, in faithfully comminuting the pabulum for nourishing the animal tissues ; and consider also the mischief caused by forcing into the stomach masses of unprepared or unmasticated food, to overtax and impair the tonicity of that important receptacle, thus causing indigestion, and laying the foundation of serious systemic derangement — is it not natural to feel that the care of these valuable organs should be confided to specialists of the "healing art" ? If a dentist claims that *his* vocation is purely mechanical, or pleases to call it "simply the practice of a mechanical art," then it would seem as if his individual services to his patients must be exceedingly limited, and they must go elsewhere



for other attention, or suffer from neglect. It can hardly be presumed that the dentist who possesses little or no knowledge of medicine, will claim a position among trained physicians, but in the present age, it is right of communities to expect that dentists shall become as well posted in the principles of general medicine as the oculist, laryngicist, or general surgeon; and indeed, the ever-increasing demands of the public upon our specialty, for its best services, makes medical training in reality a necessity.

The claims that dentistry is a legitimate specialty of medicine, has been formally recognized by the American Medical Association, and a section on dentistry was instituted by the body. *The American Lancet*, in commenting on this action, and discussing the relation of dentistry to medicine, states that, "as regards the unsavory beginnings from which dentistry has grown, no dentist was ever lower than the barber surgeons of England, and the same may be said of most specialties; hence dentistry should not be denied recognition in the medical profession because of its lowly origin." The only question at issue is, "has it so developed as to merit a place by the side of other specialties?" *The Lancet* considers that a fair literary education should constitute one of the preliminary requirements for medical students of any specialty; and as regards professional training, the same rule should apply alike to all. It favors a three-years course in a first-class college, to bring graduates up to a high standard of excellence, and declares that "the time is rapidly approaching when dentists will be quite as much doctors, in all regards, as are most specialists."

During the past summer, I received a letter from Dr. Allport, of Chicago, a gentleman well known to you all as a most able and earnest worker in the cause of dental education and professional progress. He believes "it would be better for us if no more independent dental colleges are organized, but that all dental teaching should be in connection with, or supplemental to, the teachings of first-class medical colleges, as Dr. Harris at first sought to have it; and that the future student should at least be educated in the fundamental sciences of medicine, and the principles of general surgery, under equal exactions imposed on those who practice in any other of the medical specialties." He considers this the "only proper method of making dentistry rank (as it should), as a specialty of medicine," and believes "it would give us the kind of dental practitioners needed — and a class, which if added to our Section in the American Medical Association, would make it equal in professional culture and influence to that of any other Section in that body; and as much respected for scientific knowledge and usefulness to the community."

A full recognition of properly educated dentists was shown at the great International Medical Congress, at London, in 1881, by the successful organization of a Section on Dental and Oral Surgery; and was repeated with still greater success, as a part of the International Medical Congress at Washington, in 1887. A similar Section

will probably be organized at the next congress, at Berlin, and it is earnestly to be hoped that the progressive dentists of this country and Europe will do all in their power to make the occasion worthy their beneficent calling.

Gentlemen, let us all use our best endeavors to honor our chosen specialty. New duties are ever forced upon us, which we should be prepared to meet intelligently, and thereby give evidence of ability to sustain the position we have claimed, and fill with credit the department assigned us by our great mother profession. May the achievements of our specialty ever continue to multiply, and may our hopes for still higher attainments be never in vain.









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